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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000161

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHENGDU PATRIOTIC CHURCH LEADER COOPERATING WITH AMERICAN
"ENGLISH TEACHERS"

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CLASSIFIED BY: John Hill, Acting Consul General, AmCongen
Chengdu, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. A local leader of China's officially-sanctioned Three Selves Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Christian Church and two local American English teachers discussed their cooperation in using expatriate-taught "English camps" and similar programs as a means to introduce local residents to Christian ideas. Although the Christian content of such programs is all but open knowledge, local authorities apparently tolerate such activities. End summary.

¶2. (C) Congenoffs met with Sichuan Christian Council General Secretary and TSPM minister Reverend Richard Cai and two

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American English teachers (strictly protect) to discuss the status of cooperation between China's officially-sanctioned Christian Church in Sichuan and expatriate "English teachers" who are "employees" of a legally registered educational training organization .

ENGLISH CLASSES WITH A RELIGIOUS FOCUS

¶3. (C) The teachers presented two sets of business cards - one introducing themselves as "Representatives to China" from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) with offices in Atlanta and Hong Kong, the other stating that they were "Overseas Coordination Directors" for the Hua Mei International Education and Training Center (Hua Mei) based in Chengdu. They explained that for visa purposes their presence in China was based on their affiliation with Hua Mei.

¶4. (C) Founded in 2005, Hua Mei ostensibly manages English teaching programs in and around Chengdu, using teachers from the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, explained the teachers. Each week, Hua Mei conducts about 20 hours of "business English" classes for local Chinese employees of a Singapore-based software firm. In addition, the Center also conducts relatively informal conversational English classes attended by local residents and by five or six students from the Chengdu Christian seminary.

15. (C) However, according to the teachers, Hua Mei's most important focus is its summer English camp program. Held on a high school campus in Luxian (approximately four hours south of Chengdu by car), the camp is expected to draw about 400 students this year, almost all junior and senior high school students from relatively wealthy Chengdu families. After campers conclude their morning English classes, they are free in the afternoons and evenings to interact with over 60 Christian volunteers from abroad. Camp organizers also coordinate closely with the local Luxian TSPM church, and students have in the past worshipped with the Luxian Christian community during the course of the camp.

16. (C) Neither the teachers nor Reverend Cai made any secret of the religious nature of the materials used at the camp or in Hua Mei's other English classes. Although the teachers were careful to say they obeyed all Chinese laws with respect to religion, and therefore did not engage in outright "proselytizing," they also said that the classes were an instrument of "spreading the Gospel" among their Chinese students. They stressed the "above board" nature of their work in China and noted theirs was one of very few missionary organizations in southwest China to work with the official Christian Church.

17. (C) Asked about their students' attitudes toward Christianity, the teachers admitted that virtually none of their students came from Christian families, and that many were attracted to Bible study out of a desire to understand more about the West. They also said they received few or no financial donations from their students, but said Hua Mei receives the majority of its financial support from overseas congregations of the CBF.

AND COOPERATION WITH THE OFFICIAL CHURCH

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18. (C) Perhaps most remarkable was the open nature of the cooperation between Hua Mei and Reverend Cai. Cai is one of the founders and a board member of Hua Mei, an organization he worked to legally register as a training institution with the Sichuan Bureau of Education. Cai at several points emphasized his in-depth involvement in the administration of Hua Mei, and indicated that he encouraged attendance at the camps by local youths interested in either English study or in learning more about Christianity. For their part, the teachers stressed the uniqueness of their situation in working with the officially-sanctioned Chinese Church, saying that unlike some other Christian activists they saw no contradiction between their Christian ideals and the reality of the "Three Selves" Church.

19. (C) At the same time, the teachers pointed out that other Christian missionaries in Chengdu, most of whom work with non-sanctioned house churches, treat them as outsiders due to their cooperation with the official Church. In spite of this, they are working to establish contact with other expatriate missionaries (as well as local leaders of house churches) in the hope of creating a fuller dialogue on matters of faith and on the practical problems of missionary outreach. They also noted that denominational and doctrinal differences often worked against this type of outreach.

110. (C) In response to a question from Congenoff, Reverend Cai acknowledged he had made progress on plans to establish a third TSPM Church in Chengdu. (Note: In previous conversations over

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the last two years, Cai had explained his desire to open a new

church in the university district that would cater to a younger and more educated group of Christians.) According to Cai, he has gained the agreement of the Chengdu Christian expatriate group to use their space in the afternoons after the foreigners have concluded their morning worship services. Cai said he was optimistic the plan would be approved by the Sichuan Christian Council. The Hua Mei teachers said the opening of the new church was set for September. Cai also reiterated his goal of bringing visiting foreign preachers to the new church, which the permission of the Sichuan Christian Council.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The fact that many expatriates working as "English teachers" in southwest China are actually engaged in missionary activity is no secret. However, the willingness of at least one "Three Selves" Church leader to actively guide and participate in such work comes as something of a surprise. Although Reverend Cai appears to be an unusually open and western-oriented religious leader, such cooperation could not take place without higher-level approval. The fact that Hua Mei has been able to conduct its activities for three years without interference may indicate a partial softening of official attitudes toward missionary activities in Southwest China.

HILL